

# HAITI'S EARLIEST AIR MAIL, 1921-1925

**Aim:** to tell the story of and illustrate the establishment of regularly scheduled air mail service in Haiti.

**Scope:** This exhibit is composed of pioneer air mail of Haiti flown before 2 May 1925 and regularly scheduled air mail flown in the following eight months.

**Background:** The U.S. Marines were sent to Haiti in July 1915 to establish "law and order." The peacekeeping mission remained until 1934. Beginning in 1921, the Marines had planes in Haiti for reconnaissance, aerial photography, to transport officials, to strafe and/or bomb the rebel Cacos, and to carry both official and personal mail.

The first air mail in Haiti consisted of USMC business correspondence in official service penalty envelopes which did not bear any special marking indicating that the mail was flown. Uncatalogued examples of "pioneer" mail, flown in 1921 and 1924, are included in this exhibit.



"The Marines have landed and have the situation well in hand."

USMC recruiting postcard. Circa 1915.

it. Other covers, one dated 1919 and two dated 1923 are catalogued in the *AAMC* and/or by *Muller (1950)*. They, however, have never been illustrated and/or personally seen by anyone known to this exhibitor.

In 1925, an agreement was reached with the Haitian Post Office, whereby USMC aircrafts would carry the first Haitian air mail. Regularly scheduled air mail service was inaugurated 2 May 1925 between Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haïtien. At the time Port-au-Prince, the capital, had a population of approximately 125,000. The next most important town was Cap-Haïtien situated 180 miles by land to the north. The trip by a four wheeled vehicle took approximately eight hours, whereas by air it took only 45 minutes.

## Highlights:

- 1921 (Feb. 17) **One of two known** 1921 pioneer air mail covers. **One of two known** crash covers of Haiti (other example dates from 1965).
- 1921 (Mar. 16) **One of two known** examples of pioneer mail flown in 1921.
- 1924 (Feb. 4) **Only known example** of 1924 pioneer air mail.
- Proof of early air mail cachets used to create the commemorative sheetlet of 28 November 1968.  
**Only known example.**
- First flight cover from Port-au-Prince to Cap-Haïtien of 2 May 1925 (**2 of 10 examples estimated to exist**).
- First flight cover from Port-au-Prince to Hinche of 5 May 1925. **Only known example.**
- Type 2 cachet in red and black cachet on the same cover. **Only known example.**
- **A one-of-a-kind selection of 1925 commercial air mail covers** illustrating variations in the application of and/or appearance of departure postmarks, arrival post marks, and/or air mail cachets.

**Rates:** Air mail within Haiti for single weight letters in 1925 was 50 centimes per 20 grams. The registration fee was 50 centimes. Domestic U.S. rates applied for mail which bore U.S. franking. New rates came into effect with the Pan American Agreement of 1926.

## References:

- American Air Mail Catalogue*, Vol. I (5th ed.).  
Boarino, Dr. Gerarld L., "The United States Marine Corps in Haiti (1915-1934)," *La Posta: A Journal of American Postal History*, Vol. 34, No. 5. (Oct./Nov. 2003).  
Huber, Harry E., "Haitian Airmails," *The Airmail Collector*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Nov. 1928).  
Jeannopoulos, Peter C., "Early Air Mail of Haiti," *Special Study No. 2 published by the Haiti Philatelic Society* (Dec. 2010).  
Muller, Frank. *Catalogue des Aérogrammes du Monde Entier*, 1950. Reprint, West Germany: FISA, 1970.



## HAITI'S EARLIEST AIR MAIL, 1921-1925

### 1921 Pioneer Air Mail Flight

Thursday - February 17, 1921

Berkeley, California to Lascahobas, Haiti

#### Crash Cover



*One of two known 1921 pioneer air mail covers flown by the USMC in Haiti.  
One of two known crash covers of Haiti (other example dates from 1965). Ex Sellers.*

*One piece of evidence of this early internal airmail carriage in Haiti is a remarkable, and probably unique, item in the author's collection - a Haitian "crash cover" of 1921. This oil-stained and partly burned cover and its contents were recovered from a Marine Corps plane that crashed on 17 February 1921, about two miles from the small Haitian village of Lascahobas. It originated in Berkeley, California on 29 January, with 2 cents U.S. postage, and was addressed to a civilian employee of the military stationed with the 1st Prov. Brigade of the USMC in Lascahobas. Other evidence of USMC carriage of mail by air within Haiti in this early occupation period is not known to the author, undoubtedly because such mail was of an official nature and can be found only in the military archives. Other mail to civilian employees of the military in Haiti, like this crash cover, probably exists, but it would be difficult to positively identify it as having been carried by air.*

Sellers, F. Burton. "Haiti's First Airmail Stamps," *Opusculum 1*.  
Published by the RPSC Philatelic Research Foundation, 1995.



## HAITI'S EARLIEST AIR MAIL, 1921-1925

### 1921 Pioneer Air Mail Flight

Wednesday - March 16, 1921

Port-au-Prince to Ft. Washington, Maryland

This cover is unrecorded in the *AAMC* (5th ed.) and by Frank Muller (1950). It is *one of two known 1921 pioneer air mail covers flown by the USMC in Haiti*. Significantly, it was posted slightly more than two and a half years earlier than Muller's flight #1 of 29 Sept. 1923.



*Ex Léon Montès, ex Jan Montès.*



(left) USMC cancel  
type P-R-3 dated 16 Mar. 1921  
EKU of 2 Mar. 1921 and  
LKU of 1 Jul. 1927.



(right) New York, N.Y. Registry  
Division postmark found on  
back of envelope 25 Mar. 1921.

There was no air mail rate in 1921. Domestic rates applied as this was military mail. The total postage on the cover is 12 cents which is the correct amount - 2 cents paid the surface mail rate and 10 cents the registry fee.

The typewritten notation "PER MILITARY AIRPLANE" indicates air mail but it was apparently only flown part of the way because of the time it took to reach New York. The Port-au-Prince postmark is dated 16 Mar. 1921 and the New York Registry Division registry postmark 25 Mar. 1921.

Cover was mailed by a well known philatelist of the day, Everett A. Colson, Financial Advisor appointed by the U.S. Government. Addressee W. F. Slusser was a stamp dealer with a special interest in U.S. special delivery stamps.



## HAITI'S EARLIEST AIR MAIL, 1921-1925

### 1924 Pioneer Air Mail Flight

Monday - February 4, 1924

Port-au-Prince to Cap Haïtien

**Unrecorded pioneer cover.** As it is without franking and was addressed to 2nd Lieut. Frederick Wagner Biehl, it was evidently "official service." A U.S. Marine Corps postmark (type P-6) dated 4 February 1924 was applied over a typewritten notation "PLANE MAIL." It is the **only known example** of USMC pioneer Haitian air mail flown in 1924.

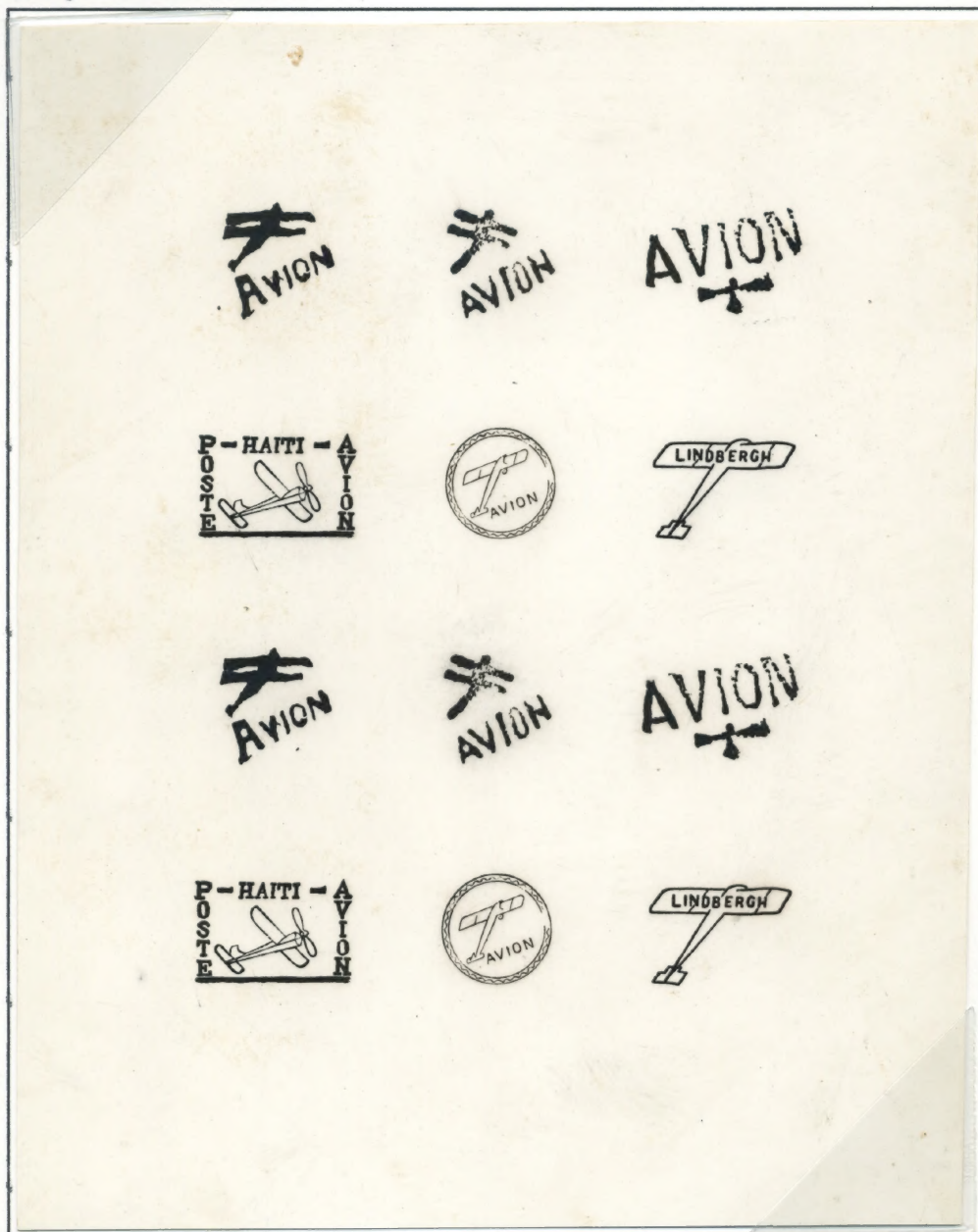


Ex Léon Montès, ex Jan Montès.



# HAITI'S EARLIEST AIR MAIL, 1921-1925

## Early Air Mail Cachets



*Ex Léon Montès, ex Jan Montès.*

(Left) Proof of cachets used for 28 November 1968 sheetlet of 12 stamps commemorating Galiffet's 1784 balloon flight and pioneer Haiti air mail flights of the 1920's. *Only known example.* The design of each stamp shows a different air mail cachet, date of a special flight and part of the white background design. Six different early air mail cachets are reproduced twice so that each stamp of the sheetlet has one.

This commemorative issue was issued on the occasion of Dr. Jan Boesman's good-will visit to Haiti. At the time he was president of F.I.S.A. and Chairman of the Hague Balloon Club. Boesman made his 250th flight on which he carried a mail sack given to him by the Haitian Director of Posts.

Of note is the fact that Haiti's first air mail cachet was not included. This is likely because all of the few covers known bore indistinct cachets with missing letters and the oval hardly discernable.

The first two stamps of the sheetlet (3x4) respectively bear the second and third air mail cachets used during 1925.

### Air Mail Cachets Used in 1925

Type 1 Oval (40 mm x 25 mm) with word "AVION"

(20 mm x 6 mm) within;

Made of rubber.

Struck in carmine;

EKU May 2, 1925; LKU May 5, 1925.

Type 2 - Silhouette of plane over "AVION,"

all caps but with "A" larger (16 mm long);

Made of rubber;

Struck in black or carmine;

EKU May 5, 1925; LKU 20 July 1925.

Type 3 - Silhouette of plane above "AVION," all letters same height

(17 mm long);

Made of rubber;

Struck in black;

EKU 13 August 1925; LKU 19 April 1927.



*Type 2*

*Type 3*



## HAITI'S EARLIEST AIR MAIL, 1921-1925

### First Flight

Saturday - 2 May 1925

Port-au-Prince to Cap Haïtien

Postmarked day prior to the flight.

Arrival backstamp applied on day of flight.

Type 1 cachet applied in carmine.



*Type 1 cachet.*

*Strikes of this cachet are all indistinct.*

In 1925, an agreement was reached with the Haitian postal authorities, whereby USMC aircraft would carry the first Haitian air mail. The agreement also stipulated that the government would maintain the landing strips and that the Administration Generale des Postes would set rates, sell postage, affix any markings deemed necessary, and deliver mail to the USMC airfields for dispatch. On 2 May 1925 commercial air mail service was inaugurated between Port-au-Prince and Cap Haïtien. It cost the Haitian government little except to improve the airfield in Cap Haïtien. It was 180 miles (282.5 km) from Port-au-Prince via St. Marc and Gonaïves to Cap Haïtien. As the roads were in terrible condition, a motor trip took 9 1/2 hours. A trip by plane could be made in 55 minutes. The establishment of air mail service contributed to better communication and commerce.

Service was thrice weekly on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturday. According to Harry E. Huber, the plane took off at or before 8 AM and returned before noon.



*Fewer than 10 covers estimated to exist.*

According to Huber, the letters measure 6 mm in height, the word "AVION" 20 mm across, and the oval 40 mm x 25 mm. Made of rubber. *All examples seen by the author are incomplete strikes, with letters and/or portions of the oval always missing.* In fact, an oval is hardly discernable. It never printed well and it has repeatedly been stated by various authors that after being used on the inaugural flight the type 1 handstamp was discarded or destroyed and never used again. Despite its obvious historic importance, an illustration of Haiti's first air mail cachet was not published until 2009.



## HAITI'S EARLIEST AIR MAIL, 1921-1925

### First Flight

Saturday - 2 May 1925

Port-au-Prince to Cap Haïtien

Postmarked day prior to the flight.

Arrival backstamp applied on day of flight.

Type 1 cachet applied in carmine.

AVION

Type 1 cachet.

Strikes of this cachet are  
all indistinct.



Huber states that mail was "closed May 1<sup>st</sup> and flight made May 2<sup>nd</sup>." The first air mail from Port-au-Prince to Cap Haïtien was flown in the early morning hours of Saturday, May 2. Upon arrival, the covers were backstamped with a Cap Haïtien double circle postmark (23 mm and 12 mm) with the date in three lines "2 / MAI / 25." Although it is catalogued that 50 letters were carried, **10 or fewer are estimated to exist today.** Only first flight cover from Port-au-Prince to Cap Haïtien addressed to someone other than W.R. Gravel. Also, this is the only known cover franked with a stamp other than the 50c orange stamp of 1924.

According to Huber, one letter was carried on the return flight from Cap Haïtien to Port-au-Prince the same day - May 2. This cover has never been illustrated nor seen by this exhibitor or anyone else known to this exhibitor. Therefore, its existence is in doubt.



Cap Haïtien arrival  
backstamp 2 May 1925.



## HAITI'S EARLIEST AIR MAIL, 1921-1925

### Second Flight

Tuesday - 5 May 1925

Port-au-Prince to Hinche

Postmarked after flight on 2 May 1925 departed.

Arrival postmark applied to cover front on same day as flight.

Type 2 cachet applied in carmine.

Jan L. Montès indicated that he was informed by the General Headquarters of the USMC that "in May 1925 the flight Port-au-Prince to Cap Haïtien was always made via Hinche." It is not known, however, if any mail for Hinche was carried on the inaugural flight.



Type 2 cachet.

REPUBLIQUE D'HAÏTI  
BUREAU DU  
CONSULIER FINANCIER-RECEVEUR GENERAL  
PORT-AU-PRINCE

Gendarmerie Commander



SERVICE OFFICIEL  
Quiconque fera un usage privé  
de cette enveloppe sera puni  
conformément à la loi.



HINCHE

This cover was posted after the biplane took off for Cap Haïtien on its historic first flight. The correspondence was sent in an official service penalty envelope and simply addressed "Gendarmerie Commandant / Hinche."

Although the indication of the month is missing in the Hinche arrival postmark, undoubtedly, it was applied on the day of the second flight (Saturday - 5 May 1925). *This is the earliest and only known air mail cover from Port-au-Prince to Hinche.*

Only one other second flight cover of May 5 is known but it had a type 1 cachet applied.



## HAITI'S EARLIEST AIR MAIL, 1921-1925

### Second Flight

Tuesday - 5 May 1925

Port-au-Prince to Cap Haïtien

Departure postmark applied day prior to flight.

Arrival backstamp applied on same day as flight.

Type 1 cachet applied in carmine.

*All known examples have indistinct strikes.*

AVION

*Type 1 cachet.*



Contrary to what has been indicated in the literature, this cover is evidence that type 1 cachet was used at least on one other occasion other than the inaugural flight from Port-au-Prince to Cap Haïtien. It is to be observed that all letters of the word "AVION" are approximately the same height. Therefore, type 1 cachet is not to be confused with type 2 cachet which has the letter "A" considerably larger than the others (e.g. "AVION"). Though the oval is not visible, as usual, it is definitely type 1 as type 3 was not introduced until August 1925. *Only known example.*



Cap Haïtien  
arrival  
backstamp  
5 May 1925.



# HAITI'S EARLIEST AIR MAIL, 1921-1925

## Fourth Flight

Saturday - 9 May 1925

Port-au-Prince to Cap Haïtien

Departure postmark applied day prior to the flight.

Arrival postmark applied to front and back of cover on same day as flight.

Type 2 cachet applied in carmine and/or black.



Type 2 cachet.



Cap Haïtien  
arrival  
backstamp  
9 May 1925.

(Right)  
Only known example  
of type 2 cachet applied  
to same cover in both  
carmine and black.



Cap Haïtien  
arrival  
backstamp  
9 May 1925.



## HAITI'S EARLIEST AIR MAIL, 1921-1925

### Sixth or Seventh Flight

Thursday - 14 May 1925 or Saturday - 16 May 1925

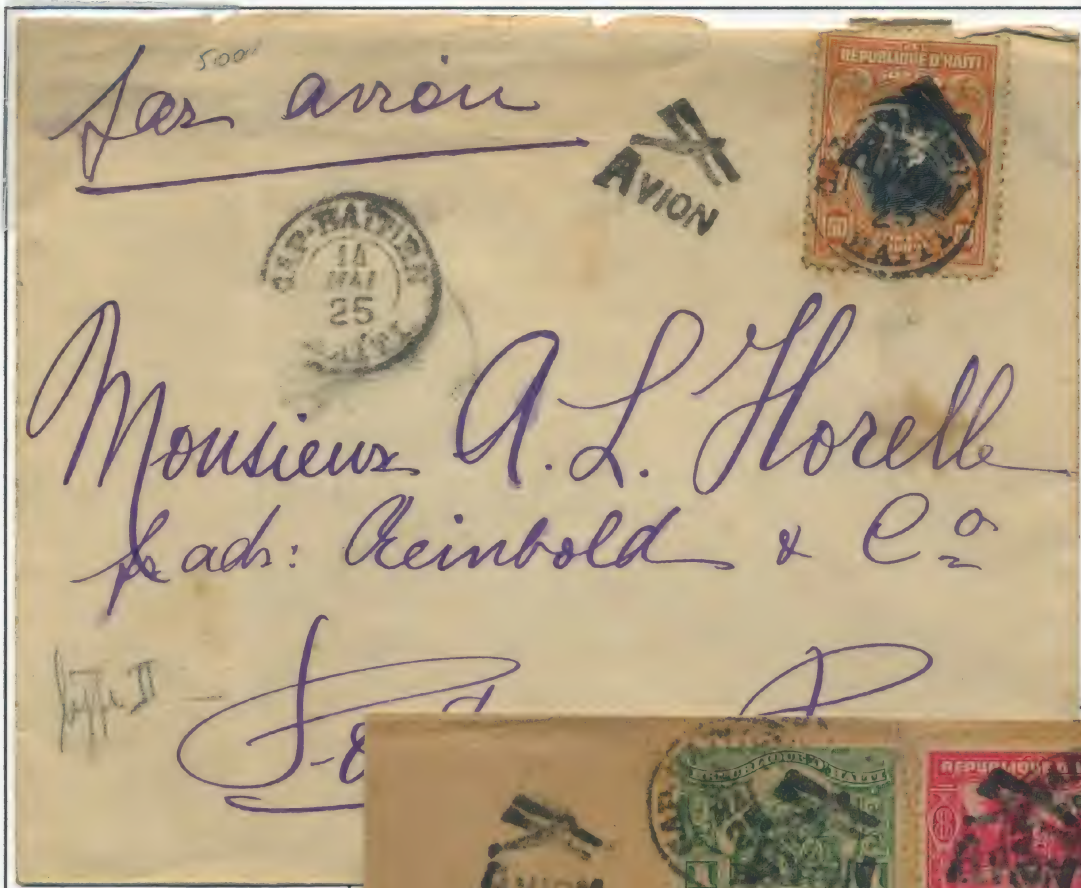
Cap Haïtien to Port-au-Prince

Postmarked the day of a flight and without backstamp. Postmark may have been applied after the flight of May 14 departed and the cover held over until the next flight of May 16.

Type 2 cachet applied in black.



Type 2 cachet.



Type 2 cachet.

### Thirteenth Flight

Saturday - 30 May 1925

Cap Haïtien to

Port-au-Prince

Postmarked applied  
after flight of May 28.

Flown Saturday, May 30.

Arrival backstamp applied

Monday, June 2 (below)

Type 2 cachet in black.



Cap Haïtien postmark applied on Thursday, May 28 after departure of plane. Single weight air mail rate was paid with 10 piastres which was the equivalent of 50 centimes. Year logo of Cap Haïtien postmark inverted.



# HAITI'S EARLIEST AIR MAIL, 1921-1925

## Fifteenth Flight

Thursday - 4 June 1925

Port-au-Prince to Hinche

Departure postmark applied day prior to flight.

Arrival backstamp applied on same day as flight.

Type 2 cachet applied in black.



Type 2 cachet.



Registered cover. Registry fee was G. 0.50 and triple weight postage of G. 1.50 paid.

Uncommon rate and destination.

## Fifteenth Flight

Thursday - 4 June 1925

Hinche to Port-au-Prince

Postmarked the day prior to the flight.

Port au Prince arrival backstamp applied on the day of flight.

Type 2 cachet applied in black.



Type 2 cachet.



Back of cover. Ex Léon Montès, ex Jan Montès.

Only 5c postage paid which was the ordinary letter rate. Underpaid by 45c. Letter mailed by member of Haiti Garde'd'Haïti (Gendarmerie).



Front of cover. Reduced 25%.



# HAITI'S EARLIEST AIR MAIL, 1921-1925

## Twenty-second Flight

Saturday - 20 June 1925

Cap Haïtien to Port-au-Prince.

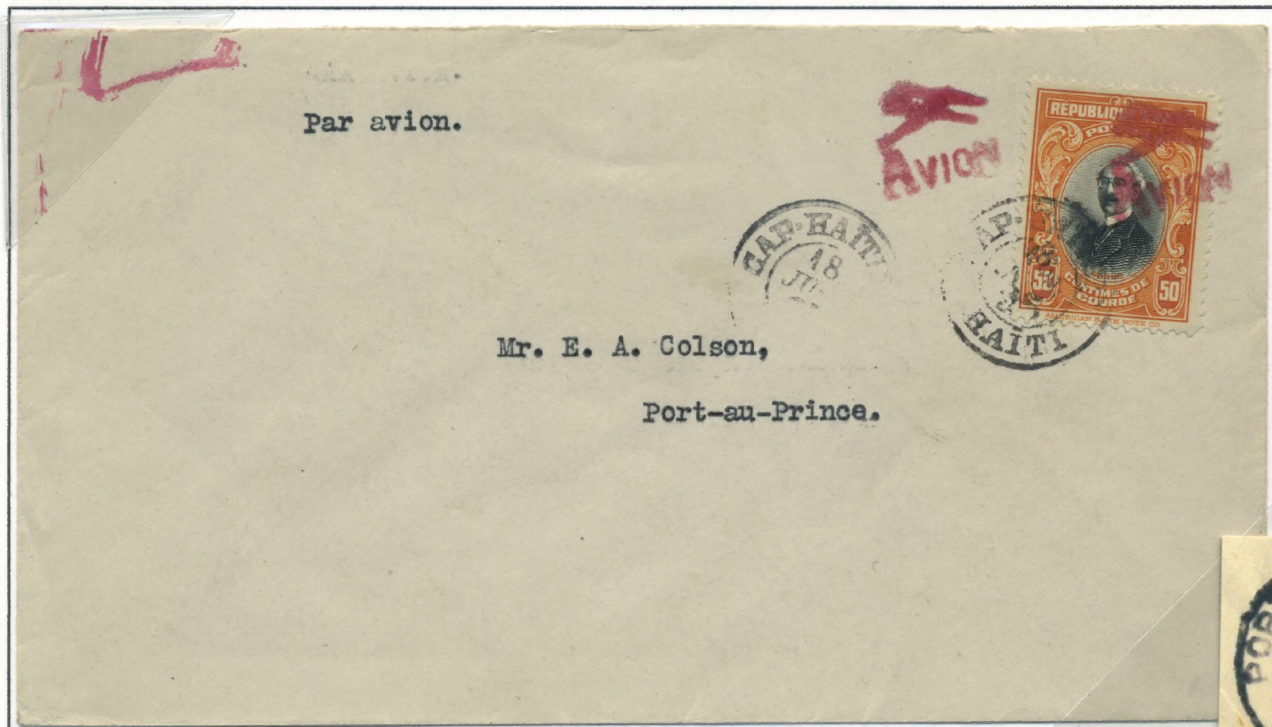
Postmarked Cap Haïtien 18 June 1925 after departure of June 18 flight.

Backstamped Port-au-Prince 21 June 1925 day after arrival on Saturday, June 20.

Type 2 cachet applied in carmine.



Type 2 cachet.



Port-au-Prince  
backstamp  
21 June 1925.



Postcard showing aerial view of Port-au-Prince.



## HAITI'S EARLIEST AIR MAIL, 1921-1925

### Thirtieth or Thirty-first Flight

Thursday - 9 July 1925 or Saturday - 11 July 1925

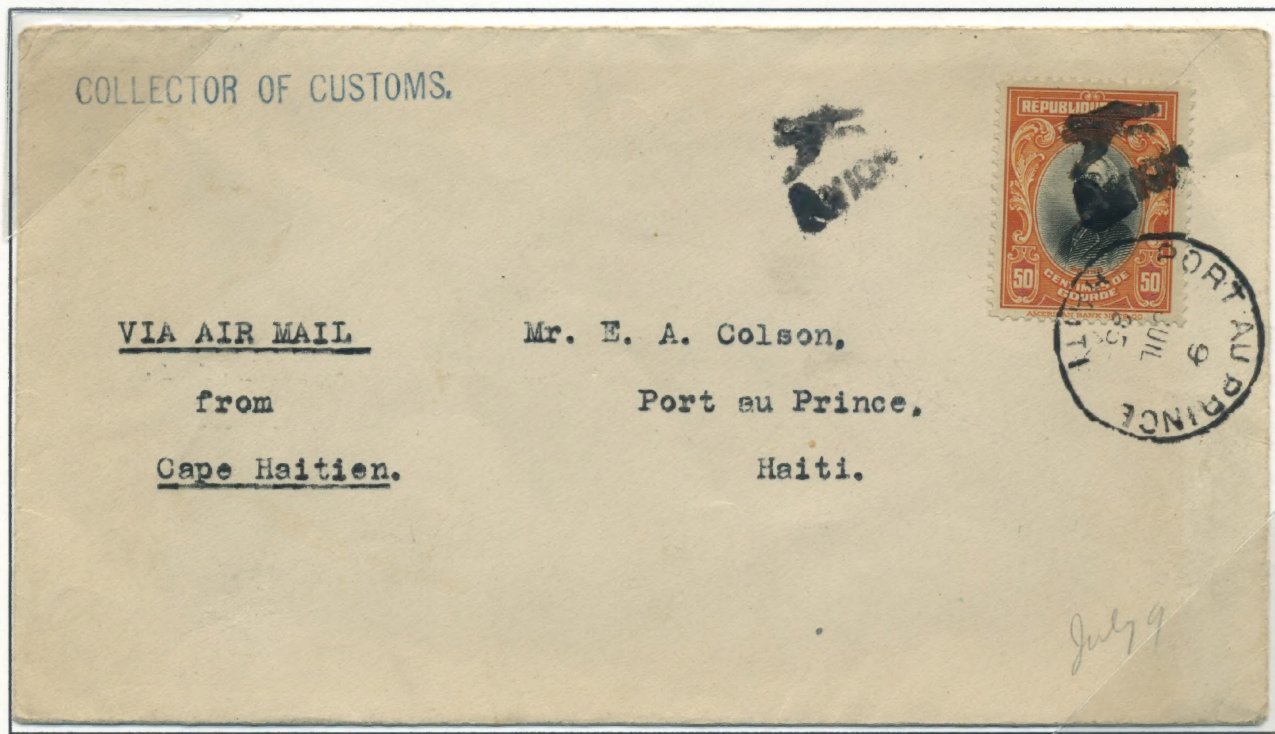
Cap Haïtien to Port-au-Prince.

Postmarked the day of a flight and without backstamp. Postmark may have been applied after the flight of July 9 departed and the cover held over until the next flight of July 11.

Type 2 cachet applied in black.



Type 2 cachet.



Real photo picture postcard of airfield in Port-au-Prince circa 1925.



# HAITI'S EARLIEST AIR MAIL, 1921-1925

## Thirty-fifth Flight

Tuesday - 21 July 1925

Cap Haïtien to Port-au-Prince.

Postmarked day prior to flight.

Port-au-Prince backstamp applied day of flight.

Type 2 cachet applied in black.



Type 2 cachet.



Port-au-Prince  
arrival  
backstamp  
21 July 1925.



## Fifty-sixth Flight

Thursday - 10 September 1925

Cap Haïtien to Port-au-Prince.

Postmarked on the day of the flight.

Port-au-Prince backstamp

10 Sept. 1925.

Type 3 cachet applied in black.



Type 3 cachet.



One of nine covers with type three cachet known used before Dec. 4. Two had the type 3 cachet applied in Aug., three in Sept., two in Oct., and two in Nov. Despite the literature, these covers are evidence that there was "official" use of type 3 cachet was prior to Dec. 4. The EKU is Aug. 13. Underpaid by 10c de g.



# HAITI'S EARLIEST AIR MAIL, 1921-1925

## Seventy-fifth Flight

Saturday - 24 October 1925  
Cap Haïtien to Port-au-Prince.  
Departure and arrival post-  
marks applied day of flight.  
Type 3 cachet applied in black.  
Registered cover - 50c postage  
and 50c registry fee.



Type 3 cachet.

One of two covers known  
flown in October.



## Ninety-third Flight

Saturday - 5 December 1925 Port-au-Prince to Cap Haïtien.  
Postmarked day prior to flight.  
Cap Haïtien backstamp applied day of flight  
Type 3 cachet applied in black.



Type 3 cachet.



Cap Haïtien backstamp  
5 Dec. 1925  
Without year logo "25."

The flight of December 5 from Port-au-Prince to Cap Haïtien is generally credited with being the first official use of type 3 cachet. This, however, is contradicted by 9 covers known used from Aug. 13 to Nov. 28.